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An Unpublished Editorial

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"The ministry which thou hast received".

"Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it".

The Lord God makes it perfectly clear that, "There are diversities of ministrations, but the same Spirit". Both in personal gifts and in corporate endowments there are differences of function.

In the above exhortation to Archippus it would be correct to underline certain words, "*The ministry; fulfil it*". From the beginning the Ascended Lord has raised up or apprehended "vessels" to fulfil particular ministries. It was so among the first apostles and servants of Christ. Through the centuries He has done this again and again. Neither has it always been individual; many times it has been collective; that is, He has raised up a people in and through whom He has sought to emphasise or represent some vital part of the whole counsel of God which had been either lost, or was falling into a lesser place than it was meant to have.

We are able to see so clearly that certain persons, and certain movements of God, stand out in history in relation to some particular aspect of "The Testimony of Jesus". That was "the ministry which they received in the Lord". There have been chief men among the brethren (Acts 15:22). The names are too many to mention, and have been just as truly collective instruments, smaller and greater, called into being for something vital to all the people of God.

Very much loss and unnecessary division might be avoided if this way of the Lord were more clearly recognised. Surely it was to this very thing that the apostle directed his words. "The eye cannot say

to the hand, I have no need of thee, or again the head to the feet, I have no use of you" (1 Cor. 12:21)!

There are those who would have all Christians doing the same thing, and because some are doing something else they are suspect. For instance, there are those who think that the Church should be wholly engaged in evangelism. There are others whose sole interest is in "teaching" and "deepening of spiritual life". This can be extended ad libitum.

Of course *the* Church of the New Testament, and any true local expression of it will be all-round and full-orbed; but because the Church has lost its balance or its fulness, God has to raise up *for the Church universal* that which may be lacking, and so we have those *complementary* ministries, and balancing functions in the Body of Christ.

Without any claims to "special revelation" or sovereign raising up for any great ministry - as such - we do feel that the Lord has given us a function and a ministry which represents a solemn responsibility to Him in its fulfilment. We do seek to keep a balance or all-roundness. We have a very real concern for the unsaved, and people, locally and abroad are being led to the Lord. We do not leave them there, but seek most earnestly that they shall be instructed and built up in Christ. Over the years many have gone from us in this two-fold purpose to many parts of the world.

But, when that is said, we have to recognise and submit to the fact that all is governed by an inclusive dominating *purpose* - the fulness of Christ. It is still a *purpose*, for we do not claim to have attained. We just cannot accept what is partial or less! It was this vision which precipitated the crises in our early history. We were in a denominational connection. To the ministry spiritually hungry people began to come from various and many connections. At that time we had a local expression - *continuously* - of what the Keswick Convention enjoyed for one week in the year - an 'all-oneness' in Christ, a transcendence of all earthly and sectarian divisions. It is difficult to see what would have happened had not the denomination forced an issue and eventually presented us with an ultimatum to either conform to the denominational requirements or leave the premises. This may have been in the sovereignty of God to get us on to clear ground without a sectarian tradition always somewhere in the foundation.

We are always glad that it was a spiritual issue and not of a "split" in the way that it has been in many cases. The Lord wonderfully provided a house for this ministry, and has blessed it with ever widening *and deepening* fulness. But, how terrible it has been misjudged. Objectively viewed, without knowledge of the real nature and course, without understanding that we had only one thought, that was to be able to meet, minister to, and have fellowship with *all* the people of God, irrespective of labels and connections, our course was interpreted just exactly to the contrary. We were said to be "schismatic", "divisive", and "out to form another sect" or "denomination". The result was ostracism, closed doors, and, to this day, antagonism. The Lord knows how false that interpretation is and how we have striven to avoid doing any such thing. But we have had to go on with our ministry; we have been compelled by the Lord to "take heed unto the ministry received... that (we) fulfil it".

The ministry is to provide Bread for the hungry; to keep God's *full* purpose in view; to enunciate, and, as He enables, represent the spiritual principles of spiritual fulness, i.e. heavenliness as other than earthliness; spirituality, as different from *man's* government and direction; universality, as against exclusiveness and sectarianism. We think that we have seen in a small way the significance of Christ as embodying all the spiritual realities and principles of God's "Home", and that the Church is meant to be conformed to His image in this respect.

We ask no one to join anything, come out of anything, or propagate anything. We seek to urge all to go on to God's full end. It is in so seeking they find crises precipitated in connections, considerations etc., that is a matter between them and the Lord.

The basis of everything is the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are sure that if the Cross has its place and power in the believer's life and therefore in the life of the Church, everything else will spontaneously emerge and take its right place and form.

Fellowship is on the basis of Christ alone, and no other. The Church is as heavenly as He was and is, and "not of this world". Because this is the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, everything has to be spiritual in the sense that it is "born of the Spirit", "led by the Spirit", "filled with the Spirit", united by the Spirit, and in all things under the Lordship of the Spirit. The Spirit must be the Teacher, through the Scriptures; the revealer of the truth within the Word, and the Former of all according to Christ. He demands absolute right of way, and freedom from all trammels of tradition and man constituted orders and systems.